

## The Power of Dreams: *"Finding a Theology of Abundance"*

Biblical Text: Acts 3:1-19

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I was a child in the 1960's. I came into young adulthood in the 1970's. In the 1960 the popular motto for the meaning of life was *"Peace and Love Not War"* or *"Sex Drugs and Rock and Roll,"* depending on whom one listened to. But by the late 70's when Ann and I were married, the meaning of life and music had devolved into Disco. *So much for enduring values!*

That tells you a little about my musical tastes, it also is a social commentary. Our values, as a culture, shift about once a decade. In part every generation seeks to differentiate itself from those before them. The evidence can be observed in music, clothing, hairstyles, film, politics, the role of religion in people's lives, etc. It also is true that the rate of change is more rapid now than ever before.

What has not changed is that people in every age are searching for meaning, if you will, the elusive *"meaning of life."* Read Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* sometime for a deep probing of this subject. Consider the options.

That great theologian, Forest Gump, once said, *"Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're going to get."* Well, is Forest right? Is life random?

M. Scott Peck began his best selling book, *The Road Less Traveled*, by writing these words, *"Life is difficult."* Is he right? Is life hard, full of struggle?

Or is the popular aphorism, *"Life is short and then you die"* true?

Some version of that perspective has been offered by philosophers from Ecclesiastes to the Existentialists. Sometimes we soften that philosophy by using euphemisms like *"passing away,"* or *"going to be with the Lord"* if we are religious, or *"kicking the bucket"* if we are not. Well, is that all there is?

For many, I think it feels like life is nothing more than the time spent between birth and death. The drudgery of existence. The boring monotony of the routine. The hope of having enough until the end. The fear that we won't. Like that.

I am convinced that one of our fundamental struggles is a battle between faith and fear, between a theology of scarcity and one of abundance. When we are captive to fear that we do not have enough, life, real life, is impossible.

Let me tell you what I mean. In *The Christian Century*, Walter Brueggemann writes: *"...we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God's abundance and the persistent power of our belief in scarcity. That belief, that fear, makes us greedy, mean, and unneighborly."*<sup>1</sup>

The most important choice we can make as a Christian is whether we will personally embrace a theology of scarcity or embrace the gift of abundance!

Consider how we seek and strive for meaning, driven by our fears.

**Possessions** - Our culture is saturated with this approach to life. Sometimes people think *"The one with the most toys wins."* The ones with the most also die.

**Pleasure** - Life can devolve into the pursuit of pleasure – *sex, drugs, and rock and roll* - or dozens of other temporary pleasures, but if that's all there is life is empty.

**Performance** - This is a big one for our culture. Work harder, longer, 24-7, and we often do. But consider asking those you love if it makes for meaningful life.

**Position** - Sometimes we think a certain profession, status, or income will bring meaning to life. Sad to say, it won't. You can have all that and still be miserable!

**Pursuits** - Some people think if they stay busy enough doing enough things, they will discover meaningful life. Yet, all they find is stress, ulcers, and heart attacks.

There is nothing inherently wrong with any of those things. But let me tell you this, although you already know it! Not one of those things lasts forever!

The truth is that life, real life, is not found in possessions, pleasure, performance, position, or pursuits. It is found in the person of Jesus Christ. The Bible says that time and time again. John 10:10, *"I have come that you may have life, and live it abundantly."* John 14:6, *"I am the way and the truth and the life."*

You might say, *"Wait a minute, don't I already have life? I'm breathing? My heart is pumping blood?"* I would answer, *"Yes, but not the life Jesus is referring to."*

**Two Greek words for life will illustrate the spiritual principle.**

The first word is *bios*, in which the English word biology is derived. It refers to the duration of life -- one's life span, the time between one's birth date and one's death date; it refers to the necessities of life -- one's food, shelter, and clothing.

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<sup>1</sup> Brueggemann, Walter "The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity," in the *Christian Century*, March 24-31, 1999. Copyright 1999 © by the Christian Century Foundation and used by permission.

The second word is *zoe*, in which the English words zoo and zoology are derived. It refers to life as God designed it. The life that belongs to God that was given to us in our creation, and is so easily lost.

When we were born we were given *bios* life, when we are born again we are given *zoe* life. Until we enter into a relationship with God through Jesus we may be physically alive but spiritually we can be dead.

Rick Warren says, *"The purpose of your life is greater than your own personal fulfillment, your career, or even your happiness. To know why you exist, you must first know the One who created you and the purpose for which you were created."*

That's the lesson of our text this morning from Acts 3. Open your Bibles.

Verses two and three set the scene:

*<sup>2</sup> Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. <sup>3</sup> When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.*

At first glance, this man might seem pitiful to us. He is lame from birth. He begs for money outside the Church doors. Not unlike people we never aspire to be, and are moved to help with many of our ministries, thank God. But look deeper. This is no ordinary beggar. It is his job, his career, if you will. And he is evidently good at it. He goes to work every day. He has enough resources to have people carry him to a position of prominence at the main temple gate.

*<sup>6</sup> Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." <sup>7</sup> Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. <sup>8</sup> He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.*

Give Peter and the other apostles some credit. They didn't look away, or turn away. They established a conversation with him. They cared enough about him to have a spiritual conversation with him. And his faith and their faith gave him something of more value. He began to walk, jump for joy, according to the text. We ask questions of the text at this point, don't we? *Was he really lame? Just how lame was he? Was he a confidence man, a sham, a fraud?*

Here's my answer. *What difference does it make?*  
**He went from begging to dancing!**

And there's even more! Whether his healing was physical, spiritual or moral, he went to Church! He praised God for what happened! And there's more for us.

<sup>11</sup> While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>12</sup> When Peter saw this, he said to them: *"Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"*

People noticed. They always do. When people go from fear to faith, from *bios* to *zoe*, from scarcity to abundance. People notice. And so do we. And look who gets the credit. Peter says, *"This is not us, it is the power of God."*

<sup>16</sup> *"By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him..."*

And there is more. He uses this moment of opportunity to let them know that this is how God works - it is what he does with all our lives, if we let him. He moves us from fear to faith, from scarcity to his abundant life, from *bios* to *zoe*!

<sup>19</sup> *"...turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."* I love that phrase, *"times of refreshing."*

I believe that's God's intention for our lives. How many of us need that today! Life can weigh down. Worries can accumulate. But Peter's message is rare.

Most Churches and most theologies, most preachers like me, lean heavy on the sins, and pretty light on the promise of refreshing. That's too bad.

Most of us do not need reminded of Romans 3:23, *"For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* We know that. We need reminded of Romans 3:24, *"For God has saved us freely by his grace."*

Refreshing, encouragement, new life, joy, our gifts used, fulfilling the purpose for which we were created. That's what we need most. And it is what God offers.

Blaise Pascal, the French mathematician and philosopher said this: *"There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every (person) which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ."*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal's Penseés Edited, Outlined, and Explained. Peter Kreeft (editor), Blaise Pascal (author.) Copyright © 1993, Ignatius Press.

If we try to stuff anything but God into that God-shaped hole in our lives, we'll end up dissatisfied, restless, discontent. But fill that God-shaped hole with God and what do we find? Life as it was meant to be lived. *Zoe*, not just *bios*.

Not just help in times of weakness. Most of us get that part of the Gospel. But purpose for the places you are strong. Most of us miss that.

Back to the text, what I find compelling is not just the beggar's weakness that was healed, but that his strengths were used. He went from being a successful beggar to being a powerful witness! **And that's what God does for us, if we let him.**

He meets us at our points of need, when we are lowest, yes he does. But he also meets us at our points of strength and says, **"Use them for me!"**

***That changes everything for us and for the Church.***

***What might happen if we gave God our abilities, our strengths, our lives, and said, "Let me live truly live for you!"***

Today we have choices to make.

We can look at our life and our world and say: ***"The economy stinks. I might not have a job next year. I live on a fixed income. I haven't had a raise in years."*** We could adopt a spirit of scarcity and choose to live that way. Many of us do.

We could look at our life and our world and say: ***"The country is in trouble. The economy is shaky. After the election it might get things worse, not better."*** We could adopt a spirit of scarcity and choose to live that way. Many of us do.

Or, we can believe and trust the words and promises of God who hold the future in his hand. Jeremiah 29:11: ***"I know the plans I have for you says the Lord. Plans to help you and not bring you harm. Plans to give you hope and a future."***

We can trust that God has amazing things in store for Old Mission and our lives. Faith rather than fear. Abundance rather than scarcity. *Zoe* instead of just *bios*.

In the words of Deuteronomy 30:19, ***"Choose life, that you may truly live."***